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2025-26 SEASON

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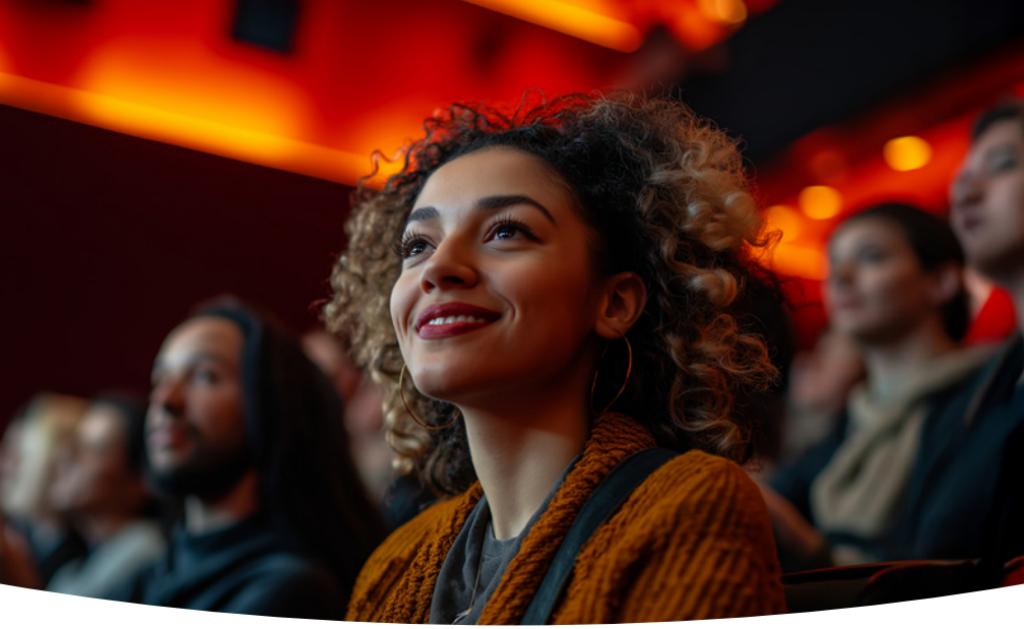
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FROM THE CEO



Dear ASO family,

I am so excited to welcome you to ASO's 60th anniversary season. What a milestone!!! This September, we celebrated the first anniversary of the ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, our first permanent home. If you have not attended a concert in Morgan Hall, please don't miss this year. *River Rhapsodies* concerts are now offered at night and during the day, so you can come when it works with your schedule. If you can't make a concert, drop by over the weekend to hear our youth ensembles or Community Orchestra rehearsing, or on a weekday to hear young violin students or our Quapaw and Rockefeller Quartets rehearsing. The acoustics in our home are so good that you can't actually hear the music unless you are in the room where it happens.



We could not be more delighted and surprised with the opportunities our new home has opened up to ASO and our community. Susie and Charles Morgan are making a \$1M investment in our youth programming so we can expand our most accessible programs to include *Intro to Violin* classes and a children's choir, and expand our service to our most advanced students, including chamber music coaching and two free private lessons before college or All-State auditions. That is just year one! We'll be announcing more programs for years two through five of the grant.

Community organizations, including the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center and the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum, have come to us with amazing partnership ideas. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with the Saint Mark Baptist Sanctuary Choir and CALS this year. Many windows and doors have opened up for us to share music and build community through music with our new home.

This year's concert season features incredible repertoire for new concert attendees and those of us who have been attending for more decades than we can count. *Don Juan*, *Carmina Burana*, Dvořák, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky are always new when I hear them; I'm truly a different person with each decade that zooms by.

Thank you for attending our concert tonight! If you are a subscriber, you get our deepest love. If you are a concert member, you are making orchestra history. And if you are neither, *why not?* Join the cool kids and become a subscriber or concert member so you don't miss a single moving, communal experience with your ASO. Visit our website or call our box office to find out how to enrich your life with more music!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Littlejohn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "C" at the beginning.

Christina Littlejohn



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MASTERWORKS Series

FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR



Dear Music Lovers,

Welcome to this concert with your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra! Whether this is your first symphony concert or your 100th, you can expect to be treated to an inspiring display of musicality, passion, and virtuosity from the outstanding professional musicians of the ASO. It is a true honor and pleasure to be in my third season as the Music Director of this fine ensemble, and we continue to work our hardest to achieve ever greater heights of artistic excellence. I believe that each concert we perform is an opportunity to build connections through the shared experience of listening to live music. Each concert is its own unique event that can never be precisely recreated, and I like to think of each as an opportunity to leave the audience in a harmonious and uplifted mindset.

As Music Director, one of my primary responsibilities is to select the music we will perform on this stage here at the Robinson Center. It is always my goal to introduce the audience and the orchestra to new music each season, written by talented and creative living composers, that shows that the orchestral art form is full of vitality and relevance in the 21st century. We also perform iconic works written by the giants of the past, that have thrilled music lovers for generations; we connect with our musical ancestors as we fill the air with the transcendent sounds of the Romantic, Modern, and Classical musical eras.

Over the course of the season, we also showcase the ensemble's versatility. Whether we are performing heart-thumping music from the soundtrack of an action film or a holiday favorite, paying tribute to a popular artist, or playing Broadway show tunes, the lush and vibrant sound of the ASO truly brings the music to life. I encourage everyone to hear the orchestra play music in a variety of styles, and our concert membership program is the ideal, most accessible way to have this experience.

As the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is now in its second year in its new home, the ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, I want to highlight that the orchestra's professional musicians do so much more than just play in the orchestra. Virtually everyone is a teaching artist, dedicated to sharing their knowledge and passion with younger generations, helping to ensure that central Arkansas remains a place where music education is accessible, fun, and a uniting experience.

The ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center is the home of our Youth Ensembles, String Academy, and all of our continuing education programs for youth and adults. I encourage everyone to visit our website, not just to find out about upcoming concerts, but to explore the full range of opportunities to play music and learn about music that are available in our Music Center, which we have dubbed a "radically welcoming hub of musical activity for ALL Arkansans." We are so proud of this facility, and of our world-class instructors who are all members of this wonderful orchestra!

With that, I invite you to sit back and enjoy this and every special concert this season with your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Robson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "G" at the beginning.

Geoffrey Robson

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Robinson Performance Hall – Little Rock, Arkansas

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Home for the Holidays

Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*Bijoux and Stephanie Smittle, *vocalists*

Bryant High School Camerata

*Tanner Oglesby, director**Lisa Hatfield, assistant director*

Little Rock Central High School Madrigals

*Christy Fudge, director**Drew Warren, assistant director*

Parkview Arts & Science Magnet School Lab Singers

*Mary Shollmier, director**CamRyn Stillman, associate director*

Episcopal Collegiate School Steel Pan Ensemble

Erick Saoud, director

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|----|
| arr. Hayen | Joy to the World Medley | 4' |
| arr. McKenzie | Angels We Have Heard on High <i>Combined Chorus</i> | 5' |
| FRANK LOESSER, arr. Kidd | What Are You Doing This New Year's Eve? <i>Stephanie Smittle, vocalist</i> | 4' |
| arr. Price and Black | The First Noel <i>Stephanie Smittle, vocalist</i> | 3' |
| THE CARPENTERS, arr. Langley | Merry Christmas, Darling <i>Stephanie Smittle, vocalist</i> <i>Combined Chorus</i> | 4' |
| arr. Catingub | Twelve Days of Christmas | 4' |
| LEROY ANDERSON | Sleigh Ride | 4' |

continued next page

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The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is supported in part by a grant from the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

PROGRAM

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|----|
| arr. Shores / Abraham | Mele Kelikimaka Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas Feliz Navidad | 9' |
| | <i>Episcopal Collegiate School Steel Pan Ensemble</i> | |

I N T E R M I S S I O N

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|----|
| arr. Goldstein | Hanukkah Medley | 7' |
| arr. Hayes | Let it Snow <i>Combined Chorus</i> | 4' |
| arr. DAVIS | Deck the Halls | 4' |
| MARIAH CAREY, arr. Flynn | All I Want for Christmas is You <i>Bijoux, vocalist</i> | 4' |
| DAVID FOSTER, arr. Foster | My Grown-up Christmas List <i>Bijoux, vocalist</i> | 4' |
| arr. Price and Black | O Holy Night (STRINGS TACET) <i>Bijoux, vocalist</i> <i>Combined Chorus</i> | 2' |
| LIVINGSTON & EVANS | Silver Bells <i>Stephanie Smittle and Bijoux, vocalists</i> | 4' |
| arr. McKenzie | | |
| arr. Stephenson | We Wish You a Merry Christmas <i>Combined Chorus</i> <i>Stephanie Smittle and Bijoux, vocalists</i> | 6' |

ORCHESTRA

Home for the Holidays

GEOFFREY ROBSON, conductor, *Pamela Diane Stephens Conductor's Chair*
BIJOUX AND STEPHANIE SMITTLE, *vocalists*

VIOLIN

Andrew Irvin
Concertmaster
Dora Paley Ronnel
Concertmaster's Chair
Kiril Laskarov
Concertmaster
Katherine Williamson
Assistant Concertmaster

†Meredith Maddox Hicks

Principal Second Violin

Eric M. Hayward

Memorial Chair

Kristen Bomberger

†Charlotte Crosmer

Leanne Day-Simpson

†Trisha McGovern Freeney

Karen Jarboe

Kristen Kunkel

Beth Massa

Sandra McDonald

Tom McDonald

Geronimo Oyenard

Tarah Reynolds

Magdalena Ryszkowski

Dan Santelices

Leigh Wing

VIOLA

‡Katherine Reynolds

Principal

Dr. Howard & Celia

Barnhard Chair

Karen Griebling

†Timothy MacDuff

Thomas McDonald

Julian Pranata

Beth Robison

CELLO

David Gerstein
Principal
Linda Garner Riggs Chair
Casey Buck
Joanna Klett
†Travis Scharer
Kristin Smith
†Jacob Wunsch

BASS

Sara Neilson
Kevin Fink
Patrick McKerlie
Benji Wilson

FLUTE

Carolyn Brown
Principal
Mara Goree
Gabriel Vega

PICCOLO

Gabriel Vega

OBOE

Leanna Renfro
Principal
Rachel Fuller
Memorial Chair
Lorraine Duso Kitts

ENGLISH HORN

Lorraine Duso Kitts

CLARINET

Marianne Shifrin
Principal
Karla Fournier

BASS CLARINET

Jacob Gatlin

BASSOON

Sofie Friedlander
Principal
Tom Dempster

HORN

David Renfro
Principal
Robin Dauer
Brent Shires
Evan Mino
Durham Hill

TRUMPET

Ross Ahlhorn
Principal
Andrew Stadler
George Worthen
Memorial Chair
Carl Mason

TROMBONE

Michael Underwood
Principal
William "Bill" Vickery, Jr.
Memorial Chair
Austin Motley
Joshua Gaub

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BRYANT HIGH SCHOOL

Tanner Oglesby, *director*

Aiden Aldridge

Brayden Armstrong

Ella Babcock

Matthew Bennett

Elijah Binns

Quinton Cavanagh

Andre' Davis

Bryce Drennon

Aubrey Ellis

Luke Elrod

Liam Foster

Sierra Gibbs

Ashlyn Guzman

Hannah Heston

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Ericah Lasage

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Tucker McDade

Talan Montgomery

Nyla Newton

Taylan Nguyen

Elijah Norman

Ike Oghu

Ayla Paredes

Brian Parker

Sydney Patton

Izzy Robertson

Sage Russell

Jacob Schlotter

Jake Seaton

Bella Simoneaux

Landon Smith

Baron Stiefvater

Carter Sullivan

Evie Summers

Nay Torres

Lydia Unsworth

Aubrey Upton

Joseph Vanover

Maddie Welch

Toni Williams

Katie Wright

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Christy Fudge, *director*

Drew Warren,

assistant director

Patrick Ashford

Chloe Bradford

Campbell Brown

Alexandra Burnett

Gage Butler

Olive Byrd

Devin Carrillo

Ankita Chakraborty

Cameron Crowder

Elizabeth Curtis

Emma Gatlin

Asoni Givens

Max Gunther

Quaid Hairston

Ryan Hampton

Nidhi Hebbar

Lois Hookstra

Lea Johnson

Kate Kostopoulos

Kristianna Lasker

Vienna Lewis

Caitlyn Liddell

Katelyn Meredith

Sylvie Newman

Kirby O'Dell

Hattie Paul

Niya Sims

Wyatt Snyder

Anthony Tapia

Kyira Thornton

Keegan Washington

Derika Wilson

Jordyn Woods

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CamRyn Stillman,

associate director

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Israel Knight

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Kylen Mack

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David Maxwell

Aidyn McClain

Xoe McCray

Ethan Mitchell

Aidan Mull

Kalani Neasley

Talara Parker

Will Pemberton

MaKenzi Pye

Chris Sanchez

Aidan Shine

Sierra Spinler

Alice Thorpe

Kassadi Tims

Morgan Tyson

Amir Weatherspoon

Ethan Wilson

Avory Withers

EPISCOPAL COLLEGIATE SCHOOL STEEL PAN ENSEMBLE

Erick Saoud, *director*

Ruth Brantley

Jack Cochran

Carson Dostert

Xavier Griffin

Abby Haselow

James Jennings

Dj Johnson

William Marks

Max McGeorge

Thomas McRae VI

Tate Mikles

Stewart O'Malley

Bowman Ritchey

Ella Saoud

Marek Sewell

Emily Stacks

**GEOFFREY ROBSON, *Music Director***

Geoffrey Robson, violinist and conductor, has recently been named the Music Director of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. He has also served as the Artistic Director of the Faulkner Chamber Music Festival since 2017 and has served on the faculty since the festival's inception in 2006. In this role, he curates a summer concert series and serves as director of a chamber music camp for students of all ages. With his background in violin performance, Robson is in frequent demand as a chamber musician, studio musician, and instrumental arranger. His violin teachers have included Erick Friedman and Alexander Kerr.

As conductor of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, Robson has conducted critically acclaimed and sold-out masterworks, pops, chamber, and educational concerts throughout the state. His innovative programming has brought new audiences into the hall and made all feel welcome and has inspired and energized the orchestra.

Robson regularly conducts opera and ballet, as well as symphonic and chamber music. His conducting teachers have included David Hayes, John Farrer, and Larry Rachleff. He loves to collaborate with creative individuals, and to make music outside of the 'classical' genre, especially improvised music.

**BIJOUX, *vocalist***

BIJOUX, the versatile vocalist and entertainer, embodies a captivating blend of influences in her music. Hailing from Arkansas with West African heritage, her artistry reflects her eclectic life journey, drawing from folk, rock and roll, makossa, country, and R&B. With classical training and a deep passion for jazz, gospel, and hip-hop, Bijoux's musical voyage started in 2007 with a neo-jazz ensemble, eventually leading to a prolific solo career in 2009. During her over 15-year career, she's thrived in diverse musical environments, from collaborating with Rodney

Block & The Collective to performing with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. In 2019, she released two distinct singles, "Dit Moi" and "Go With It," showcasing her unique vocal fusion of feel-good melodies and deep cuts. Bijoux, a vocal DJ, consistently delivers authentic art, promising a rich musical experience no matter where you encounter her.

**STEPHANIE SMITTLE, *vocalist***

A native of Cave Springs, Arkansas, Stephanie Smittle (she/her) is a singer and songwriter whose history of engagements includes singing ancient chant in reverberant cathedrals, premiering new classical art songs by living composers for the recital hall, and composing gender-flipped murder ballads in the freak folk tradition. Her self-titled debut solo album is a collection of ten songs for voice and electric autoharp, which the Arkansas Democrat Gazette called "folk rock from outer space... a stunning self-titled solo debut" from "a skilled and observant lyricist unafraid to express vulnerability and rage and wonder."



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With the Foundation Board's stewardship and belief in the importance of ASO for the quality of life for Arkansans, the endowment has grown from \$2.7 million in 2009 to \$12.3 million today. Earnings from the endowment now generate close to \$450,000 each year for the ASO's operations.

As the endowment has grown over the years, so has ASO's ability to responsibly make long-term commitments to increase the pay for our professional musicians and add music education programs for our young people.



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Distributions from the Foundation **allow ASO to hire professional musicians to make a living and choose to call Arkansas home, be a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all, and remain a financially strong and flourishing organization.**

ASO has served Arkansas through music for 60 years, and **endowment gifts to the Foundation either in present or through legacy gifts make it possible for ASO to keep serving the community for the next 60 years and beyond.**

ASO's endowment is a source of long-term funding to support ASO's mission to serve Arkansas through music.

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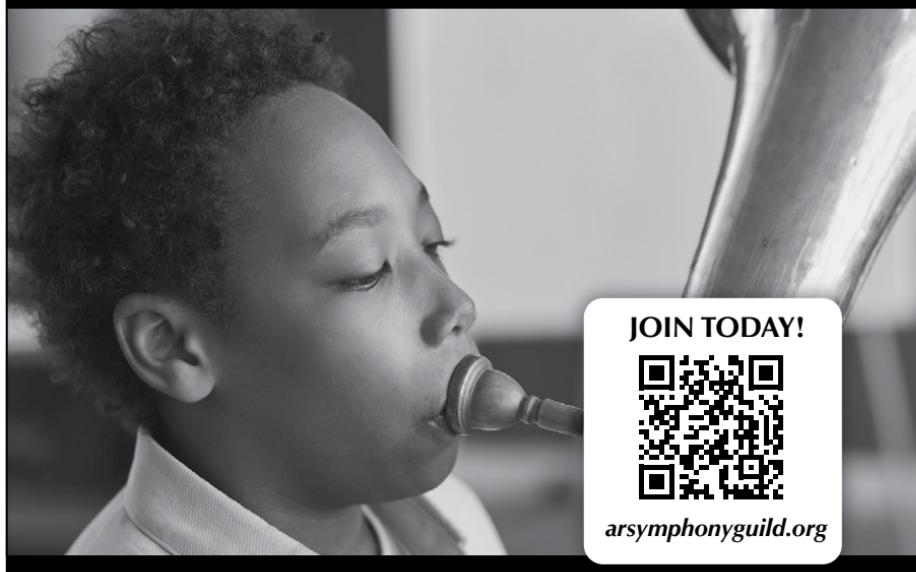


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Saturday, January 24, 2026 • 7:30 PM Sunday, January 25, 2026 • 3:00 PM
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STELLA BOYLE SMITH MASTERWORKS SERIES

REBIRTH AND REVOLUTION

Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*
Alexander Kerr, *violin & guest concertmaster*

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----|
| BOULANGER, Lili (1893-1918) | <i>D'un matin de printemps ("On A Spring Morning")</i> | 5' |
| PROKOFIEV, Sergei (1891-1953) | Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63 I. Allegro moderato II. Andante assai III. Allegro, ben marcato <i>Alexander Kerr, violin</i> | 26' |

INTERMISSION

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|-------------------------------------|--|-----|
| SHOSTAKOVICH, Dmitri (1906-1975) | Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47 I. Moderato II. Allegretto III. Largo IV. Allegro non troppo | 45' |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----|

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The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is supported in part by a grant from the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

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ALEXANDER KERR, *violin & guest concertmaster*

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Dora Paley Ronnel
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Kiril Laskarov
Concertmaster
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ALEXANDER KERR, violin

Alexander Kerr's expressive and charismatic style has made him one of the most accomplished and versatile violinists on the international music scene today. In 1996 at the age of 26, Mr. Kerr was appointed to the prestigious position of Concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. After nine successful years at that post, he left in June 2006 to assume the endowed Linda and Jack Gill Chair in Music as

Professor of Violin at the Indiana University Jacobs School

of Music. In addition to his teaching responsibilities in Bloomington, he maintains a busy concert schedule appearing with orchestras and in recital and chamber music performances throughout the U.S., Asia, and Europe. In 2008, he began his tenure as Principal Guest Concertmaster of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and in September 2011, he assumed his role as Concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Regarded by the press as a masterful virtuoso with an elegant, old-world sound, Mr. Kerr has appeared as soloist with major orchestras throughout the United States and Europe, working with such renowned conductors as Mariss Jansons, Riccardo Chailly, Gustavo Gimeno, Fabio Luisi, Peter Oundjian, Donald Runnicles, Robert Spano, Alan Gilbert, Jaap van Zweden, Michael Tilson Thomas, and David Zinman.

An active chamber musician, Mr. Kerr has collaborated with Martha Argerich, Leif Ove Andsnes, Emanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Yefim Bronfman, Cho-Liang Lin, James Ehnes, Edgar Meyer, Truls Mørk, Menahem Pressler, Vadim Repin, Alisa Weilerstein, Kim Kashkashian, and Maxim Vengerov in performances at festivals in Aspen, Santa Fe, Caramoor, La Jolla, Seattle, Stavanger, and throughout Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Switzerland, Austria, and the Netherlands.

Mr. Kerr's CD releases include the Dvořák Piano Quintet with Sarah Chang and Leif Ove Andsnes on the EMI label, music by Dutch composer Julius Röntgen on the NM Classics label, Horn Trios of Brahms, Leshnoff, and Lennox-Berkeley on Naxos, and the Shostakovich Romance on a series of discs including "Violin Adagios" and "Evening Adagios" released by Decca. A live DVD and CD recording of Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* with Mr. Kerr, the RCO, and Maestro Mariss Jansons was released in 2005 on the RCO's own label: RCOLive!

A Cuban American, born in Miami, Florida and raised in Alexandria, Virginia, Mr. Kerr began his studies at age seven with members of the National Symphony Orchestra. He went on to study with Sally Thomas at the Juilliard School and with Aaron Rosand at the Curtis Institute of Music where he received his Bachelor of Music degree in 1992.

PROGRAM NOTES

D'UN MATIN DE PRINTEMPS / *Lili Boulanger*

b. Paris, France / August 21, 1893 – March 15, 1918

Lili Boulanger is one of many artists and composers whose life was cut short far before their time. At only 19 years old, Lili was the first woman to ever win the prestigious Prix de Rome composer's competition, and she continued writing up until the moment of her death, helped by her sister Nadia Boulanger, famed teacher. This piece, "D'un matin de printemps" (Of a Spring Morning), coupled with "D'un soir triste" (Of a Sad Evening), was the last work notated in Lili's own hand before her death at age 24.

Lili Boulanger is considered a master of these impressionist colors and textures. Her musical talent was evident in her earliest years as she tagged along with her sister Nadia to sit in on her classes at the Conservatoire of Paris. A near-fatal attack of pneumonia when she was 3 kept her from mastering any instruments. Instead, she turned to composition and began serious study when she was 16. Only three years later, she had won one of the most prestigious composer's awards.

Though written on her deathbed, the color and harmony present in Lili's D'un matin de printemps conveys a new awakening that belies her weak and fragile condition. The piece opens with a fluttering theme in the flute and woodwinds, later transferring throughout the strings. The mood is playful and mischievous, and one cannot help but picture the buzzing of bees among the budding flowers. The climax uses trills in the brass and winds which convey the excitement of a new day, all rushing to the end and punctuated by a final glissando in the harp. The ebb and flow of this piece between dream-like and alertness truly keeps you hooked until the end, which comes far too soon!

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 2 / *Sergei Prokofiev*

b. Sontsivka, Ukraine / April 23, 1891 – March 5, 1953

Sergei Prokofiev, in 1935, was anxious to return home to Russia, then undergoing significant political and social changes under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. His Second Violin Concerto was his last Western commission as well as his last composition before returning to Russia permanently. At this stage in his life, Prokofiev was aiming for a new simplicity in his works and wanted a total change in energy from his first violin concerto, composed in 1915.

The three-movement concerto begins with a lonely statement by the soloist in a 5-beat motive, which creates a feeling of unease. The orchestra then enters in a different tonality, further throwing off the listener. The tumultuous atmosphere between orchestra and soloist continues in surprising dissonances before slowing down to become something altogether Romantic in style. The movement closes with two dry pizzicato thuds from the entire orchestra.

The second movement marked Andante assai is gentle and romantic. Referred to as "sunlight to the first movement's darkness," the virtual ballet scene unfolds unrelentingly in the accompaniment. As the momentum progresses, the orchestra begins to awaken gradually. The roles of soloist and orchestra then switch before the end as the soloist takes up the pizzicato accompaniment while the orchestra plays the delicate main theme.

The final movement is a wild and exhilarating ride to the very last note. Prokofiev adds castanets in the percussion section, which gives a Spanish flavor to the energetic finale. At first, the movement seems energetic but still held back. As things progress, the rhythms increasingly feel off balanced and raucous, as the soloist is asked to perform the theme more insistently each time. The finish is dizzying, with nowhere to gain traction as the orchestra and soloist are forced to tumble to the very end in a stellar finale.

SYMPHONY NO. 5 / *Dmitri Shostakovich*

b. Saint Petersburg, Russia / September 25, 1906 – August 9, 1975

Dmitri Shostakovich's works spanned a period in Russia in which artistic output was heavily policed. Straying outside the prescribed boundaries of the Communist regime could often be life threatening, and in this phase of his life, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was a letter to the Supreme Leader, begging forgiveness and quite literally saving his own neck.

Thankfully, the Fifth Symphony was received with praise for the popular composer, as it checked all of Stalin's boxes: no dark underlying meanings, clear melodic material, and an enthusiastic ending to leave a good taste in everyone's mouth.

Regardless of any hidden intentions, it is true that Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is an extraordinary experience. The work opens with lower strings taking up a jagged theme reminiscent of the opening of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. In sharp contrast, a more lyrical theme wanders throughout, present in the gentle solo flute. Intensity builds as the music develops into a frenzied march heralded by the horns in their lowest register. The flute returns, passing the melody to the celeste which ends the movement with dark uncertainty.

The short second movement is a satirical take on a waltz. A dance floor is implied amidst the sound, with heavy boots stomping, a squeaky clarinet jester, and a dance master with a violin. After an evening of frivolity, an angry outburst interrupts a solo oboe and ends the party abruptly.

The third movement contains some of Shostakovich's best work. Written in just three days, the extraordinary 13-minute-long Largo caused audience members to openly weep (at a time when crying in public was frowned upon). It is a requiem, filled with anguish and lament over those who were lost. This exquisite ode to grief and suffering fills out the symphony in a way that could only have been done amidst the fraught and dangerous atmosphere it was written in.

To come up with an upbeat ending for his symphony, Shostakovich wastes no time in turning the mood completely upside down with a swaggering and bold entrance in the brass. Next, in an unexpected moment, the mood switches again to remembrance and grief before the woodwinds bring back the relentless march to the very end. The triumphant ending is slightly colored by the minor version of the original theme, but nonetheless it earned Shostakovich the stamp of approval by Stalin, thereby saving his reputation, at least for another decade.

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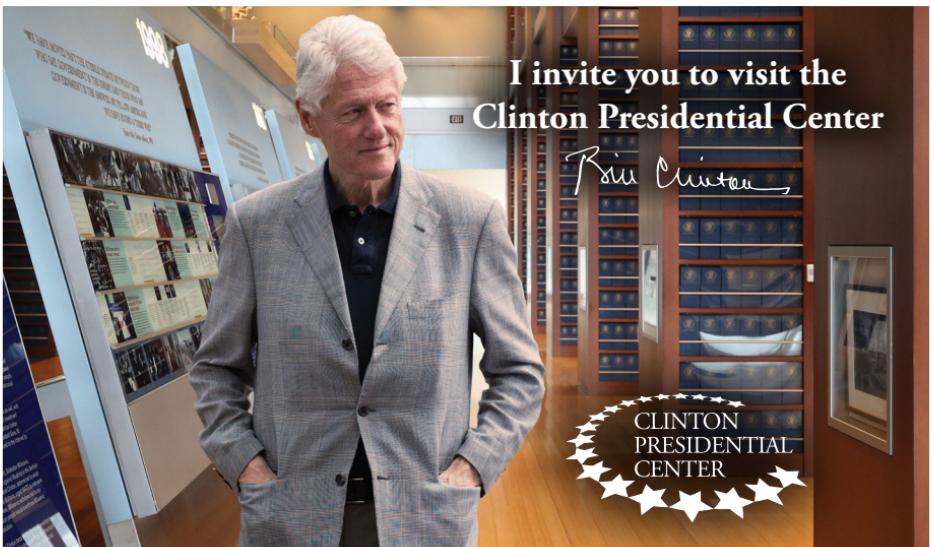
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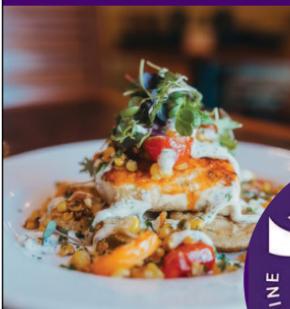
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